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Small Business in Canada:  
A Statistical Overview

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# *Small Business in Canada:*

## *A Statistical Overview*



Entrepreneurship and Small Business Office  
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Industry Canada  
5th Floor, East Tower  
OTTAWA, Ontario  
K1A 0H5  
Tel.: (613) 954-3601  
Fax: (613) 954-5492

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- There were 920 729 businesses (with employees) in Canada in 1992, a 30 percent increase since 1982. Of these businesses, 97 percent had fewer than 50 employees, and 99 percent had fewer than 100 employees. The Northwest Territories and the Yukon had the lowest percentage of businesses with fewer than 100 employees. Quebec and Ontario had the highest percentage.
- Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) were estimated to contribute to some 57 percent of total private sector gross domestic product (GDP) in 1992.
- In 1993, there were 1 912 000 self-employed persons, representing 15.4 percent of the total work force (up from 13.5 percent in 1983).
- Between 1982 and 1992, self-employment grew as rapidly as did SME employment (31 percent). The finance, insurance and real estate, services and construction sectors grew the fastest, while manufacturing, other primary industries and transportation, communication and other utilities had the slowest yet still positive growth.
- SMEs are starting to capture new export markets, particularly in the service sectors.
- From 1982 to 1992, the number of businesses in Canada grew at an annual average growth rate of 2.6 percent. Newfoundland and the Northwest Territories grew at the fastest rate, while Saskatchewan and Manitoba showed the slowest growth.
- A significant portion (48 percent) of the SME contribution to the economy is internally financed, most of which comes from retained earnings.
- Between 1973 and 1993, spending on research and development (R&D) as a percentage of GDP has more than doubled in Canada.
- Successful SMEs invest more in R&D, apply technology more rapidly and develop more products and services than do other firms.

## Major SME Trends

Globalization and technological change are causing dramatic shifts in the comparative advantage of advanced industrial nations. Economies are moving away from mass-produced, standardized products toward highly differentiated, specialized ones. There is a broad consensus that Canada's dependence on a commodity- and resource-based economy is diminishing as production of knowledge-intensive goods and services increases. Two indicators of this shift are the proportion of research and development (R&D) expenditures to gross domestic product (GDP) and the proportion of the population having a university degree. Over the past 20 years, both of these ratios have more than doubled. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are playing a key role in this transition.<sup>1</sup>

SMEs represent a very significant proportion of the business community in Canada. Data for 1992 show that there were 27 percent more businesses in 1992 than in 1982 (see Table 1). Ninety-nine percent of these new businesses were SMEs.<sup>2</sup>

**TABLE 1**  
**Number of Businesses (Including Self-employed Businesses)<sup>a</sup>**

	1992	1982	Percentage change
Self-employed (no employees)	1 185 700	948 000	25.1
Employer businesses <sup>b</sup>	920 729	710 615	29.6
Total businesses	2 106 429	1 658 615	27.0

<sup>a</sup> Excludes public administration.

<sup>b</sup> Includes 909 744 small businesses in 1992 and 701 221 in 1982.

Source: Based on estimates prepared by Entrepreneurship and Small Business Office, Industry Canada, Ottawa.

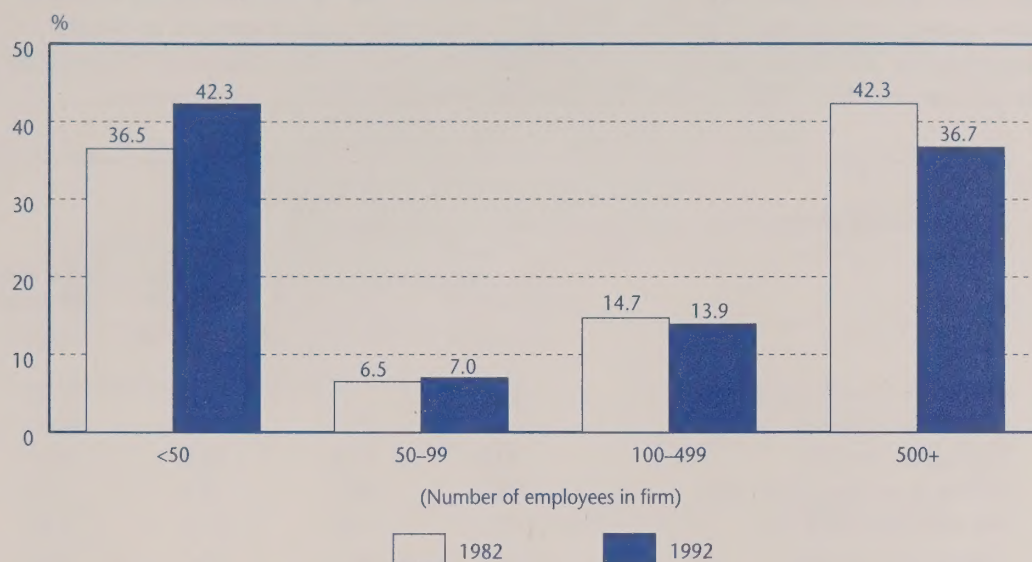
Between 1982 and 1992, the latest period for which there are comprehensive data available from Statistics Canada, businesses with fewer than 100 employees have increased their share of employment to 49.3 percent from 43.0 percent (Figure 1). Conversely, businesses with more than 500 employees experienced the largest decrease in employment share during that period.

One measure of the vitality of any sector is its contribution to GDP. As of 1992, SMEs contributed well over half (57.2 percent) of the private sector GDP: 43 percent from businesses with fewer than 100 employees, and a further 14.1 percent from medium-sized businesses (Table 2). This is up 4.6 percent from the 1982 level.

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise stated, "small business," in this report, includes any firm with fewer than 100 paid employees in the manufacturing sector, and fewer than 50 paid employees in all other sectors. Medium-sized businesses generally have 100 to 500 employees. To date, all but approximately 2 000 of the more than 2.1 million businesses in Canada were either self-employed individuals or SMEs.

<sup>2</sup> This report contains the latest available data as of November 18, 1994.



**FIGURE 1**Distribution of Employment, by Size of Business,<sup>a</sup> 1982 and 1992<sup>a</sup> Includes self-employed; excludes public administration.

Source: Based on estimates prepared by Entrepreneurship and Small Business Office, Industry Canada, Ottawa.

**TABLE 2**

SME Contribution to GDP, 1982 and 1992

	1982	1992	Percentage change
Employed	89.8	88.8	-1.0
Self-employed	10.2	11.2	1.0
Firms with fewer than:			
50 employees	31.4	36.6	5.2
100 employees	37.5	43.1	5.6
500 employees	52.6	57.2	4.6

Source: Based on estimates prepared by Entrepreneurship and Small Business Office, Industry Canada, Ottawa.

## Employment

Small business employment varies greatly from sector to sector. In general, small business activity is concentrated in sectors that are not capital-intensive, such as services (see Figure 2 and Table 3), and is less prominent in capital-intensive sectors such as communications, manufacturing and utilities. The small proportion of people employed by small businesses in educational services arises because this sector is dominated by schools and other large, publicly funded institutions.

**TABLE 3**  
Share of Employment<sup>a</sup> Accounted for by SMEs, by Industry, 1992

Industry	Industry employment	Fewer than 50 ALUs <sup>b</sup>	Fewer than 100 ALUs <sup>b</sup>	Fewer than 500 ALUs <sup>b</sup>
	(000s)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Agriculture and related services	108.9	90.4	95.9	100.0
Fishing and trapping	9.1	93.4	96.7	100.0
Logging and forestry	41.2	73.8	73.8	81.6
Mining, quarrying and oil wells	144.1	16.7	21.6	37.7
Manufacturing industries	1 830.5	21.6	31.7	53.7
Construction industries	503.1	74.4	82.7	95.0
Transportation and storage	396.0	31.9	39.9	56.3
Communication and other utilities	365.3	6.8	8.7	14.8
Wholesale trade	622.7	51.6	64.2	83.4
Retail trade	1 553.3	46.0	53.7	63.7
Finance and insurance	687.2	14.1	17.5	24.9
Real estate and insurance	231.1	55.5	66.6	83.2
Business services	660.8	45.1	53.5	72.5
Educational services	888.5	4.7	7.4	21.0
Health and social services	1 106.1	24.9	32.1	53.4
Accommodation, food and beverage services	806.1	54.7	66.1	80.8
Other service industries	721.9	57.2	65.3	80.0
To be classified <sup>c</sup>	60.9	77.8	77.8	85.2
<b>Total: All industries</b>	<b>10 736.7</b>	<b>36.0</b>	<b>43.8</b>	<b>59.2</b>

<sup>a</sup> Excludes public administration and the unincorporated self-employed.

<sup>b</sup> ALU = average labour units employed by a firm. It can be taken as equivalent to the number of employees per firm.

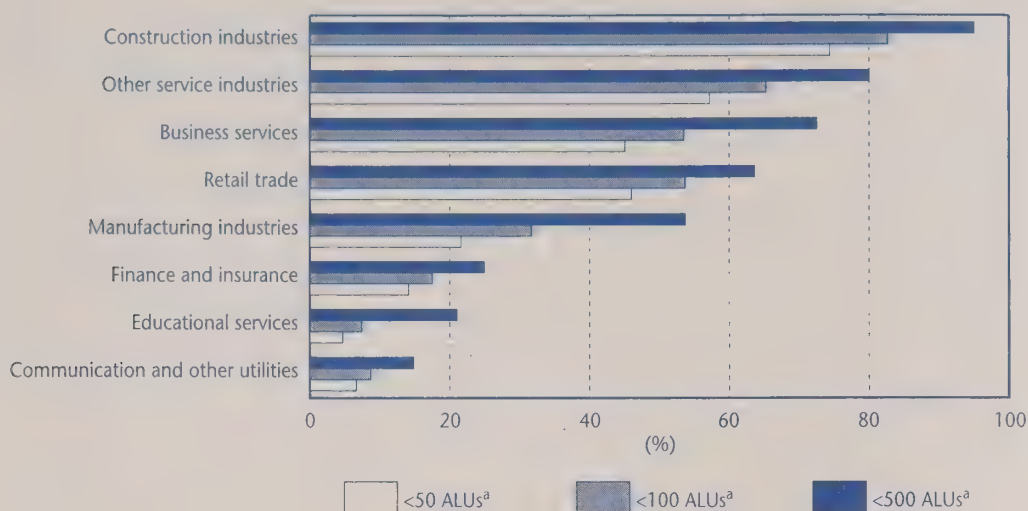
<sup>c</sup> Includes firms whose classification has not yet been determined.

Source: Estimates prepared by Entrepreneurship and Small Business Office, Industry Canada, based on data supplied by Statistics Canada.

Figure 3 and Table 4 show that the importance of SMEs as employers varies from region to region. Even in Ontario, which has the lowest percentage of SME employment, more than half of that province's work force is employed by SMEs. Eighty-five percent of all workers in the Yukon are employed by SMEs.

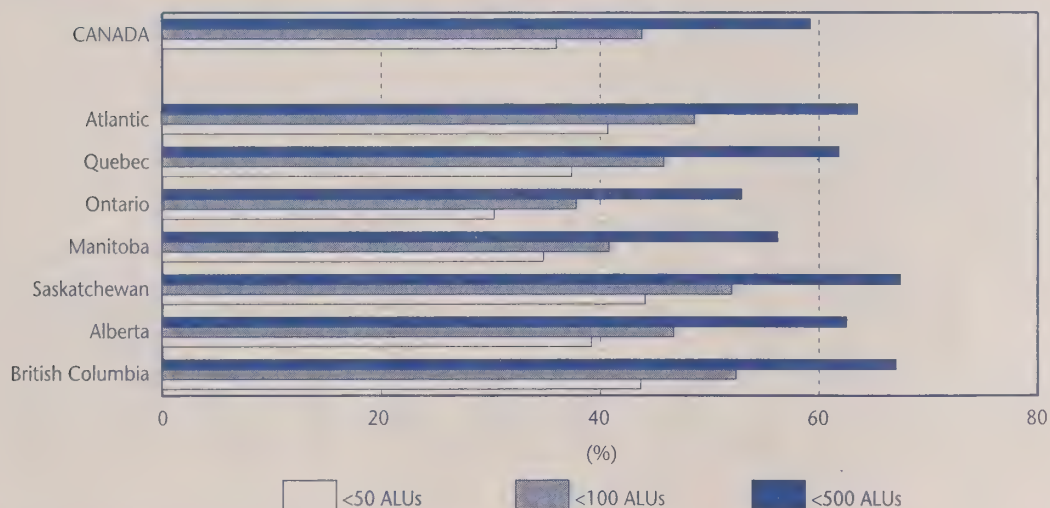
SMEs constitute the vast majority of firms in the nations analyzed. Canadian SMEs had a greater share of employment (75.1 percent) in the manufacturing sector than either the United States (62.2 percent) or Germany (46.6 percent). As measured by their percentage of value-added, SMEs in Canada play a more important role in the manufacturing sector than counterparts in the United States, Japan or Germany (Figure 4).



**FIGURE 2****Share of Employment Accounted for by SMEs, Selected Industries, 1992**

<sup>a</sup> ALU = average labour units employed by a firm. It can be taken as equivalent to the number of employees per firm.

Source: Based on estimates prepared by Entrepreneurship and Small Business Office, Industry Canada, and Statistics Canada, Ottawa.

**FIGURE 3****Share of Employment<sup>a</sup> by SMEs, by Province, 1992**

<sup>a</sup> Excludes public administration and the unincorporated self-employed.

Source: Based on estimates prepared by Entrepreneurship and Small Business Office, Industry Canada, and Statistics Canada, Ottawa.

**TABLE 4****Employment<sup>a</sup> in SMEs, by Province, 1992**

	Total employment	Fewer than 50 employees	Fewer than 100 employees	Fewer than 500 employees
	(000's)	(%)	(%)	(%)
CANADA	10 736.7	36.0	43.8	59.2
Newfoundland	139.2	40.4	47.1	60.1
Prince Edward Island	40.6	51.0	60.1	73.6
Nova Scotia	288.5	37.3	45.8	62.1
New Brunswick	221.8	41.6	49.1	62.1
Quebec	2 506.2	37.4	45.8	61.8
Ontario	4 442.0	30.3	37.8	52.9
Manitoba	417.4	34.8	40.8	56.2
Saskatchewan	306.6	44.1	52.0	67.4
Alberta	1 062.7	39.2	46.7	62.5
British Columbia	1 346.1	43.7	52.4	67.0
Yukon	10.0	63.0	70.0	85.0
Northwest Territories	23.9	38.9	44.4	63.2

<sup>a</sup> Excludes public administration and the unincorporated self-employed.

Source: Estimates prepared by Entrepreneurship and Small Business Office, Industry Canada, based on data supplied by Statistics Canada.

**FIGURE 4****International Comparison of SME Share of Employment and Value-added, Manufacturing Sector, Selected Countries, Various Periods between 1979 and 1989<sup>a</sup>**<sup>a</sup> Depending on the country, the years of analysis varied with the availability of data.Source: United Nations, *Small and Medium-sized Transnational Corporations: Role, Impact and Policy Implications* (New York: United Nations, 1993)



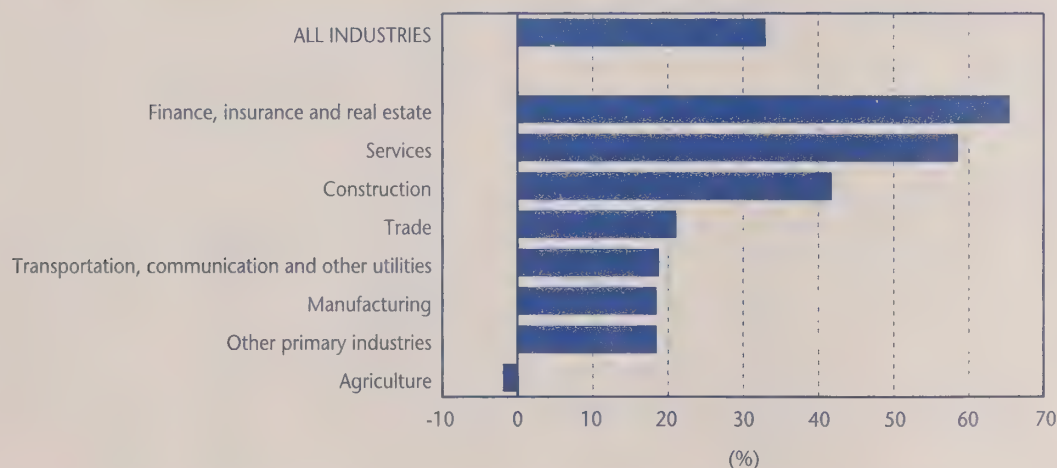
Canada's self-employed are also playing an increasingly important role in our economy. Between 1982 and 1992, self-employment grew as rapidly as did SME employment (31 percent). There are two distinct groups within the self-employed category: those businesses that have employees (mostly incorporated) and those that do not (largely unincorporated). Many incorporated self-employed business owners draw a salary; their business is therefore classed as an employer business.

In the past decade, changes in technology and the social climate have made it easier for an individual to become self-employed. In 1993:

- There were 1 912 000 self-employed persons, representing 15.4 percent of the total work force (up from 13.5 percent in 1983).
- Self-employment in the finance, insurance and real estate, services and construction sectors grew the fastest, while the manufacturing, other primary industries and transportation, communication and other utilities recorded the slowest, yet still positive growth in self-employment (see Figure 5). The self-employed share of total employment in agriculture declined slightly.
- The self-employed represented 58 percent of all workers in agriculture, 35 percent of all workers in construction and 18 percent in other primary industries.
- Alberta, British Columbia, Quebec and Manitoba had the largest increases since 1983. Prince Edward Island's, New Brunswick's and Saskatchewan's portions decreased over the same period.

**FIGURE 5**

**Growth in Self-employment, by Industry, 1983 to 1993**



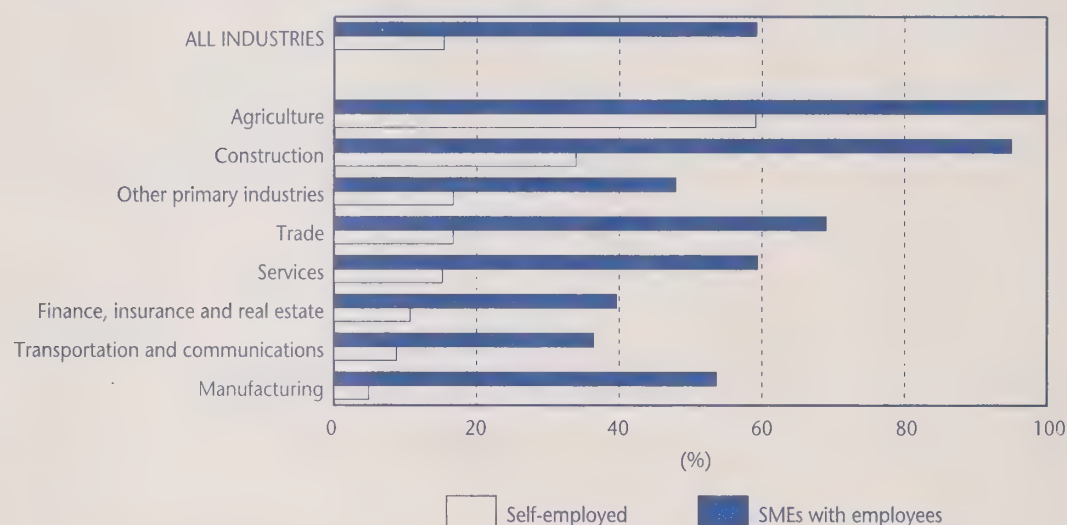
Source: Estimates prepared by Entrepreneurship and Small Business Office, Industry Canada, based on data from *Labour Force Annual Averages*, Statistics Canada Catalogue No. 71-529, annual.

In 1993, 33.5 percent of all self-employed businesses in Canada were incorporated, up slightly from the 30 percent recorded in 1983. Almost 39 percent of male self-employed are incorporated whereas only 22 percent of female self-employed are.

Over the past decade, the percentage of self-employed women increased at a faster rate than the proportion of females in the work force in Canada. The largest increases occurred in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta; the smallest were in Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, Quebec and Ontario.

Self-employment tends to run countercyclical to employment trends as a whole. In other words, when the number of available employer-based jobs decreases, the number of self-employed persons tends to increase (Figure 6).

**FIGURE 6**  
Share of Employment<sup>a</sup> Accounted for by Self-employed<sup>b</sup> and SMEs,  
Selected Industries, 1992



<sup>a</sup> Excludes public administration.

<sup>b</sup> Includes incorporated and unincorporated self-employed.

Source: Estimates prepared by Entrepreneurship and Small Business Office, Industry Canada, based on data from *Labour Force Annual Averages*, Statistics Canada Catalogue No. 71-529, annual.



**B**usiness start-ups and exits are another measure of the vitality of SMEs.

For statistical purposes, a business start-up is broadly defined as:

- creation of a new business (business birth)
- a change in ownership of a business
- a change in the *form* of ownership (for example, a move from sole proprietorship to incorporation) or
- an upgraded employer status (a shift to a higher category of number of employees).

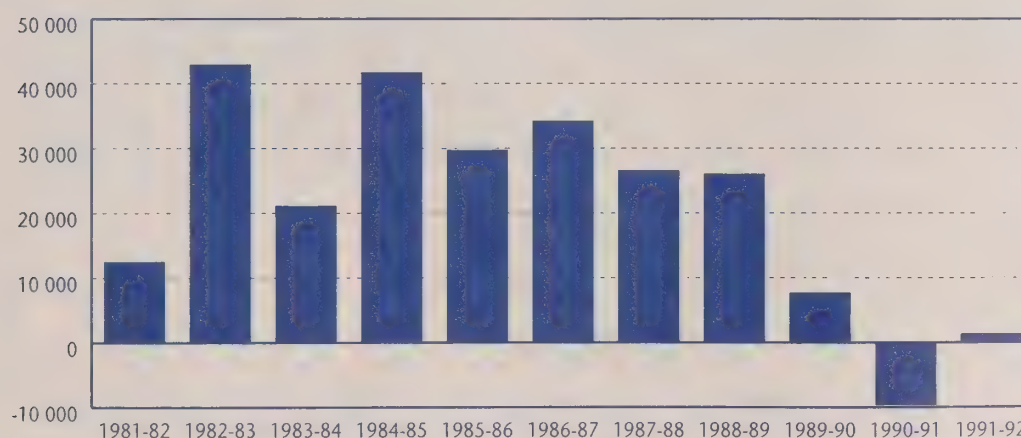
Similarly, business exits are defined as:

- dismantling of a business (business death) (bankruptcies account for less than 10 percent of business deaths)
- the elimination of one or more locations of a multi-location business
- a downgraded employer status (i.e. from having some employees to having zero employees) or
- a change in ownership.

Figure 7 shows the net change in the number of SMEs from 1981-82 to 1991-92.

In 1990-91 there was, for the first time in more than a decade, a significant decrease in the net number of businesses — a reflection of the recession which gripped the economies of Canada and most other industrialized nations at that time.

**FIGURE 7**  
Net Change in Numbers of SMEs,<sup>a</sup> 1981 to 1992



<sup>a</sup> Excludes public administration and the unincorporated self-employed.

Source: Estimates prepared by Entrepreneurship and Small Business Office, Industry Canada, based on data supplied by Statistics Canada.

Table 5 shows business start-ups and exits between 1981 and 1992. Note that the number of start-ups peaked in 1988-89 at 165 980, and has been falling ever since. The number of exits, on the other hand, fluctuated during this period, increasing as the business economy entered a recession, then falling sharply in 1991-92 by 12 percent from the previous year's level as the recovery got under way. Figure 8 shows the differential impact of the net effect on selected industries.

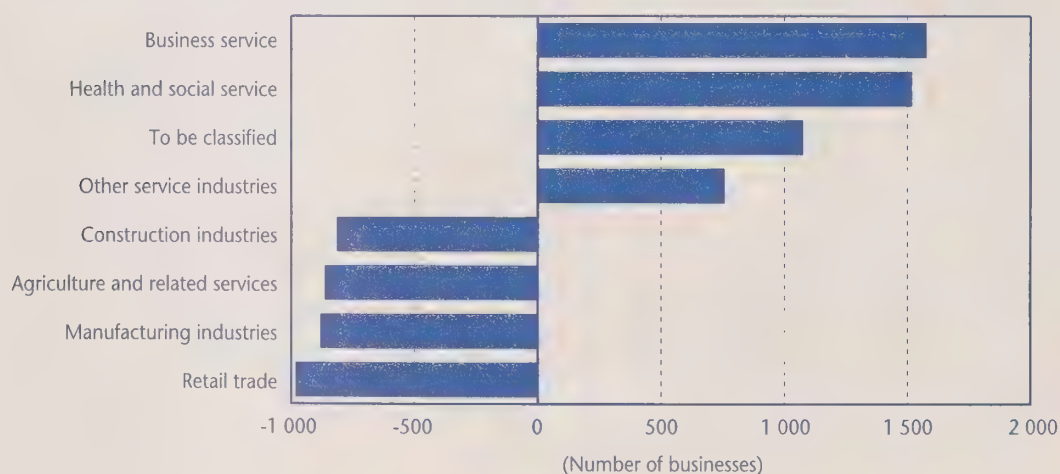
**TABLE 5**  
Business Start-ups and Exits, 1981 to 1992<sup>a</sup>

	Start-ups	Exits	Net increase
1981-82	119 126	106 653	12 473
1982-83	145 154	102 251	42 903
1983-84	138 547	117 371	21 176
1984-85	152 213	110 520	41 693
1985-86	152 472	122 828	29 644
1986-87	161 285	127 085	34 200
1987-88	161 931	135 349	26 537
1988-89	165 980	140 054	25 926
1989-90	162 347	154 680	7 667
1990-91	148 073	158 269	(10 196)
1991-92	140 711	139 429	1 282

<sup>a</sup> All sizes of businesses; excludes public administration and the unincorporated self-employed.

Source: Estimates prepared by Entrepreneurship and Small Business Office, Industry Canada, based on data supplied by Statistics Canada.

**FIGURE 8**  
Net Change in Number of Businesses,<sup>a</sup> Selected Industries, 1991-92



<sup>a</sup> All sizes of businesses.

Source: Estimates prepared by Entrepreneurship and Small Business Office, Industry Canada, based on data supplied by Statistics Canada.



Most of the start-up activity took place in the service industries, particularly business, health and social services, and in the miscellaneous (to be classified) category. The goods and primary sectors reported the largest decreases. Table 6 illustrates these start-ups and exits. Almost all (99.8 percent) business start-ups and exits were by SMEs.

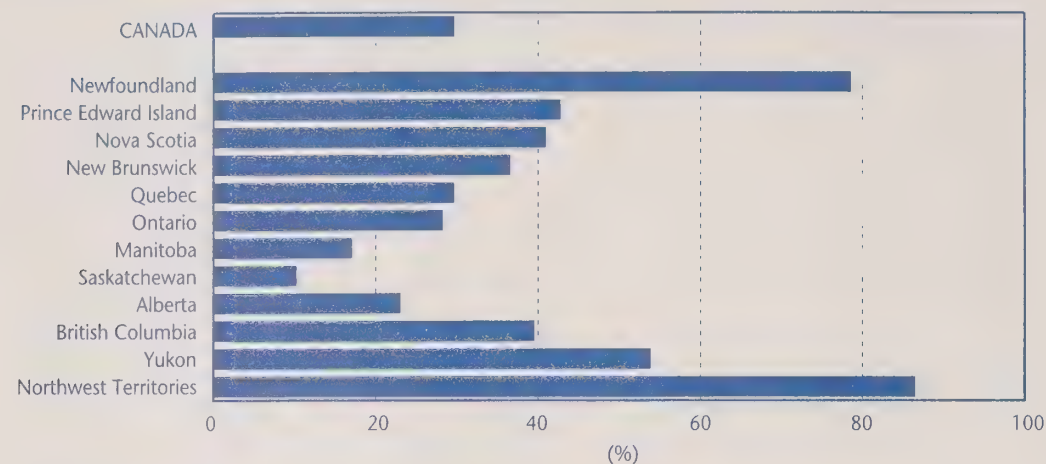
**TABLE 6**  
**Business Start-ups and Exits, by Industry,<sup>a</sup> 1991-92**

Industry	Start-ups	Exits	Net increase
Agriculture and related services	7 632	8 494	(862)
Fishing and trapping	881	864	17
Logging and forestry	1 672	1 684	(12)
Mining, quarrying and oil wells	555	750	(195)
Manufacturing industries	5 660	6 540	(880)
Construction industries	16 897	17 710	(813)
Transportation and storage	4 835	4 983	(148)
Communication and other utilities	733	680	53
Wholesale trade	6 557	6 528	29
Retail trade	19 479	20 460	(981)
Finance and insurance	3 431	3 851	(420)
Real estate operators and insurance agents	4 415	4 439	(24)
Business service	12 973	11 398	1 575
Educational service	877	752	125
Health and social service	5 836	4 320	1 516
Accommodation, food and beverage service	10 956	10 484	472
Other service industries	24 721	23 965	756
To be classified	12 601	11 527	1 074
<b>Total: All industries</b>	<b>140 711</b>	<b>139 429</b>	<b>1 282</b>

<sup>a</sup> All sizes of businesses; excludes public administration and the unincorporated self-employed.

Source: Estimates prepared by Entrepreneurship and Small Business Office, Industry Canada, based on data supplied by Statistics Canada.

SME growth trends between 1982 and 1992 demonstrate that small firms are becoming increasingly important to, and prevalent in, Canada's regional economies as well. This is particularly noticeable in the four Atlantic provinces, Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia, where growth in the number of business registrations exceeds the national average (see Figure 9 and Table 7).

**FIGURE 9****Growth in Number of Businesses,<sup>a</sup> by Province, 1982 to 1992**<sup>a</sup> Excludes public administration and the unincorporated self-employed.

Source: Based on estimates prepared by Entrepreneurship and Small Business Office, Industry Canada, Ottawa.

**TABLE 7****Number of Businesses,<sup>a</sup> by Province, 1982 to 1992**

	1982	1992	Growth (%)	Average annual growth rate (%)
CANADA <sup>b</sup>	710 515	920 729	29.6	2.6
Newfoundland	12 529	22 365	78.5	6.0
Prince Edward Island	5 162	7 368	42.7	3.6
Nova Scotia	22 620	31 862	40.9	3.5
New Brunswick	19 678	26 853	36.5	3.2
Quebec	175 406	227 306	29.6	2.6
Ontario	241 856	309 948	28.2	2.5
Manitoba	30 514	35 716	17.0	1.6
Saskatchewan	37 974	41 853	10.2	1.0
Alberta	86 977	106 983	23.0	2.1
British Columbia	102 001	142 266	39.5	3.4
Yukon	1 002	1 541	53.8	4.4
Northwest Territories	1 328	2 475	86.4	6.4

<sup>a</sup> Excludes public administration and the unincorporated self-employed.<sup>b</sup> Provincial figures do not sum to Canada totals, as some companies are counted in more than one province but only once in Canada.

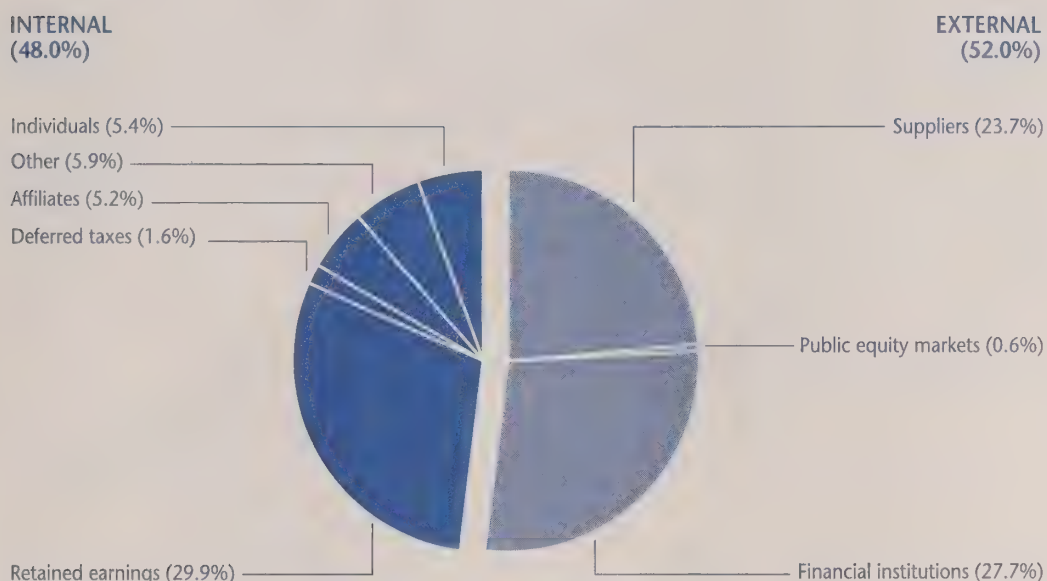
Source: Estimates prepared by Entrepreneurship and Small Business Office, Industry Canada, based on data supplied by Statistics Canada.



The biggest impediment to expansion for SMEs, after a need for more orders, is access to capital, according to Statistics Canada's October 1994 Survey of Business Conditions. A significant portion (48 percent) of the SME contribution to the economy is internally financed, most of which comes from retained earnings (Figure 10). The next two major sources of financing for SMEs are loans from financial institutions and credit obtained from suppliers.

A November 1994 Statistics Canada survey<sup>3</sup> on small business financing found that 81 percent of small firms which applied for bank financing received it. Sixty-six percent of firms which attempted to secure financing via the *Small Business Loans Act* (SBLA) were successful.

**FIGURE 10**  
Sources of Financing for SMEs,<sup>a</sup> 1992



<sup>a</sup> SMEs are defined here as having less than \$25 million in annual revenues in 1992.

Source: John R. Baldwin, *Strategies for Success: A Profile of Growing Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (GSMs) in Canada* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada Catalogue No. 61-523R, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada, "National Survey on the Financing of Small Business," *The Daily*, November 15, 1994 (Ottawa: Statistics Canada Catalogue No. 11-001E).

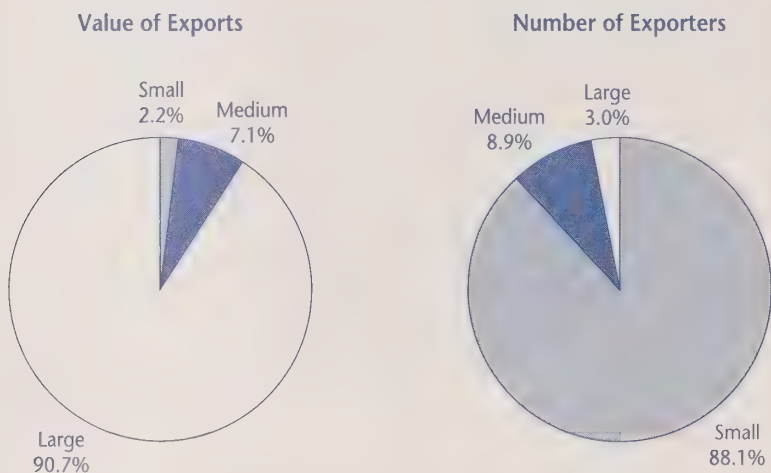
## SME Exports

In our global economy, exports play an important role. Although SMEs accounted for only about 9 percent of the value of our exports (see Figure 11), the number of SMEs exporting is growing rapidly — from 33 000 in 1986 to 73 000 in 1992. In 1991-92, during the early part of the economic recovery, small business exports grew at a slower rate than those of medium-sized businesses. However, the relative share of SME exports declined because exports by large firms grew even faster. Further, these new exporters are concentrating their activity over a much broader sphere than the typical large exporter.

Large exporters tend to specialize in a limited number of well-known sectors, such as transportation equipment, pulp and paper, and mining. In several industries where Canada is beginning to capture new export markets, particularly those in the fast-growing service field, SMEs are the driving force behind a major portion of the new export activity. This activity can be seen in both expanding markets and the increased variety of products exported.

**FIGURE 11**

Share of Export Participation, by Firm Size,<sup>a</sup> 1992



<sup>a</sup> Size is defined by the value of goods/services exported:

small = less than \$500 000

medium-sized = \$500 000 to \$5 million

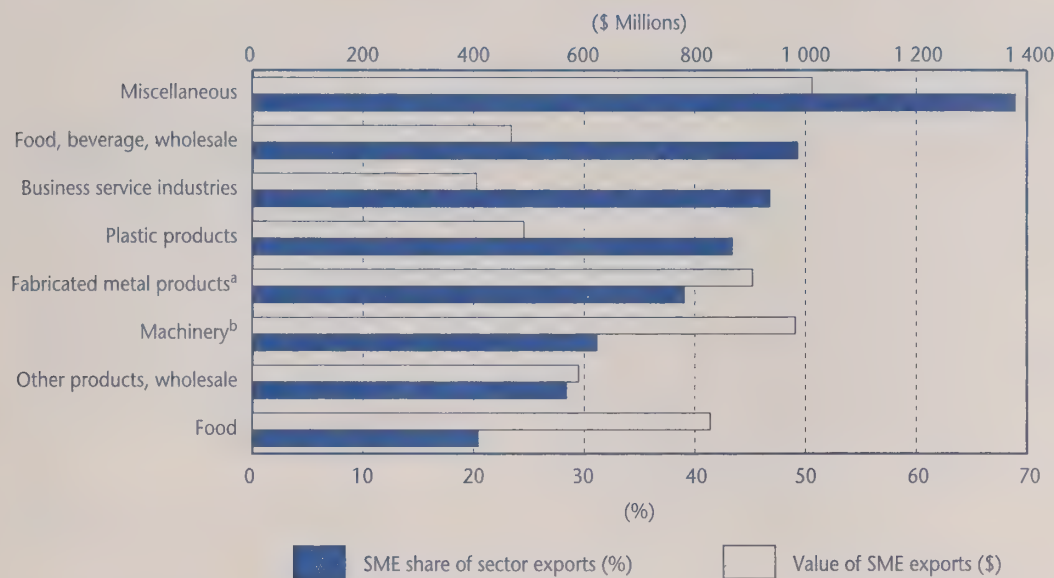
large = over \$5 million.

Source: Estimates prepared by Entrepreneurship and Small Business Office, Industry Canada, based on data provided by Statistics Canada.



Many SMEs export a wide range of goods and/or services. Export markets are constantly changing, and small exporters must adjust their products and/or services to meet such change. This wide range must sometimes be classified to the miscellaneous category of the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) and explains why Figure 12 shows this as the largest SME export category.

**FIGURE 12**  
**Top SME Export Industries, 1992**



<sup>a</sup> Except machinery and transportation equipment.

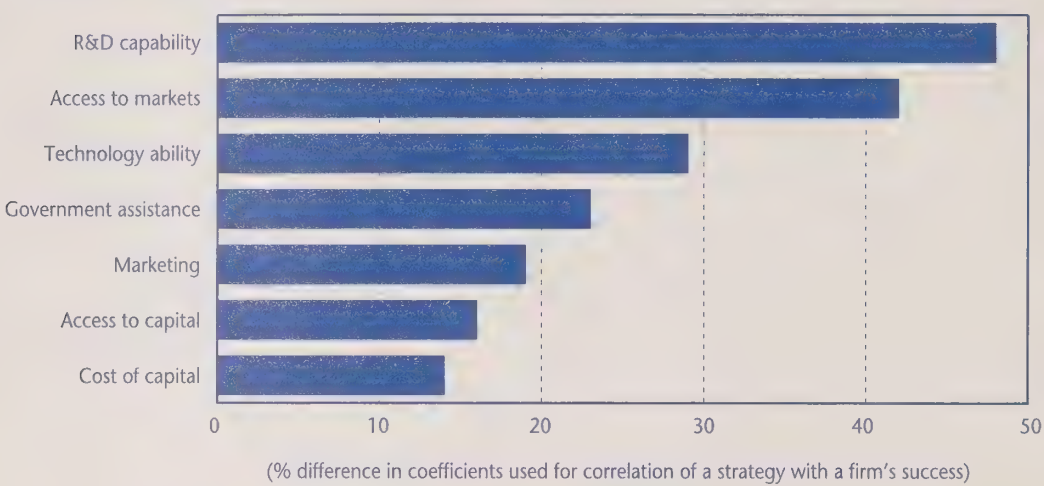
<sup>b</sup> Except electrical machinery.

Source: Estimates prepared by Entrepreneurship and Small Business Office, Industry Canada, based on data provided by Statistics Canada.

# Characteristics of SME Success

The link between R&D spending and firm performance is unmistakable (Figure 13). A joint Statistics Canada/Industry Canada study<sup>4</sup> of some 2 000 growing SMEs reported that the single most important determinant of success was a firm's innovative capabilities. Highly successful SMEs invest more in R&D than do other firms, they apply technology more rapidly, and they develop more new products and services. A high level of management skill is an essential component of success. Firms that mimicked their competitors or did not reach out to capture new markets tended to be associated with significantly less growth, even decline.

**FIGURE 13**  
Characteristics of Success for SMEs<sup>a</sup>



<sup>a</sup> Differences in Mean Score for a given strategy between the more-successful and less-successful firms. Success is defined by the level of a firm's increase/decrease in market share.

<sup>4</sup> John R. Baldwin, *Strategies for Success: A Profile of Growing Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (GSMEs) in Canada* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada Catalogue No. 61-523R, 1994).



## Human Resources

A major 1994 study<sup>5</sup> profiled the human relations practices of a representative sample of 714 businesses by, among other criteria, size of firm. The study data suggest that most firms (of all sizes) place a low strategic priority on human resource development.

The human resources practices of firms were divided into three classes — Traditional, Compensation and Participation — according to the extent to which a business focused on training, enhancing employee participation, job quality, providing compensation incentives or making other investments in their employees. Seventy percent of small businesses and businesses in older industries were found to fall into the Traditional category because they place a low strategic priority on human resources.

On the other hand, more mid-sized firms were found to be in the Participation category (they place high value on rewards and incentives, including bonuses and internal promotion) than were large firms. Those mid-sized firms in new, technology-driven industries were particularly likely to follow the Participation-style human resources model. These firms emphasized employee participation and job design and followed family-friendly policies.

The study also attempted to link firm performance to its human resources practices. While not conclusive, the authors found considerable evidence pointing to a favourable impact on performance from the adoption of Participation-category human resources practices. More research is needed to establish the full extent and nature of these links.

## Research and Development

Between 1973 and 1993, R&D spending as a percentage of GDP has more than doubled in Canada.<sup>6</sup> However, even with this growth, Canada remains near the bottom of member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in its business expenditures on R&D.

While most of this R&D spending is still concentrated in the top 100 companies (which accounted for 67 percent of all R&D spending in 1993), this is down from their 77 percent share in 1973. A related indicator of a broader spread of activity is the number of firms reporting R&D spending; between 1984 and 1993 this number more than doubled, from 1 800 to 4 000. Most of these new R&D participants are SMEs.

## Human Resources and R&D Profiles of SMEs

<sup>5</sup> Gordon Betcherman et al, *The Canadian Workplace in Transition* (Kingston: Queen's University Press, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> Statistics Canada, *Science and Technology Indicators* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada Catalogue No. 88-201, 1994); and *Industrial Research and Development* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada Catalogue No. 88-202, 1994).

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